

Integrated absolute dating approach for terrestrial records of past climate using trapped charge methods (INTERTRAP) - the blessing and turmoil of implementing for the first time an ERC grant at a Romanian university

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This year marks European Research Council's (ERC) 10th anniversary. Romania is celebrating as well 10 years as a member state of the European Union. Over the past decade Romania has made significant progress in supporting research development at the national level. However, when it comes to excellent frontier research as supported by the ERC, Romania's involvement and visibility at a European level remains very low. Considering only young researchers, according to ERC statistics only 142 proposals hosted by institutions in Romania have been submitted in the Starting and Consolidator Grant schemes in the last 3 years (2014-2016). For corresponding funding schemes at a national level Romania's Executive Agency for Financing Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI) received over 2000 applications only in 2016. The success rate of ERC proposals hosted by Romania is even more concerning (less than 3%) with only 4 projects out of 142 being granted.

In 2015, Dr Alida Timar-Gabor was awarded an ERC starting grant (grant agreement No [678106]; INTERTRAP) which is the first ERC project to be implemented in a Romanian university. In the INTERTRAP project Dr Timar-Gabor and her team aims to achieve significant improvement in quartz based luminescence dating and to develop new absolute dating techniques for Quaternary sediments. During the implementation of the project a new state-of-the-art luminescence and electron spin resonance laboratory, unique in Eastern Europe and one of the only two or three in the world, will be set up.

Dr. Alida Timar-Gabor, PI of INTERTRAP, is the founder and leader of the only absolute dating laboratory in Romania that was founded in 2008. She has defended her PhD in 2010 and supervised and co-supervised 10 other PhD students since then. She holds various national and international awards. Her career path has been significantly influenced by a strong network of international collaborations. In this presentation she will give an overview of her research career with emphasis on: (i) importance of international collaborations, (ii) establishment of herself in a research field using results obtained in a not yet fully established laboratory, (iii) the hardships but also the rewards of being in charge of a research laboratory from a very young age and (iv) the difficulties encountered in the implementation of an ERC research grant in a Romanian university.

Romania's readiness to absorb ERC grants will be discussed in the framework of a case study. The level of support in preparing the grant application as well as the implementation of INTERTRAP at Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca Romania will be compared to the RELOS grant (Reducing empiricism in luminescence geochronology: Understanding the origins of luminescence from individual sand grains, ERC-2014-STG, grant agreement No [639904]), a grant in the same research field lead by Dr. Jan-Pieter Buylaert and hosted by the Technical University of Denmark.